Released for Press use

NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 19 TORONTO September, 1942

CHINESE JEWS

No, the heading is not a misprint. The Chinese Jews were not transients from other lands but Chinese citizens with Chinese surnames, who actually were Chinese in language, life and customs, and differed from the rest of the people only in the matter of religion. They had rolls and sectional books of the Hebrew Scriptures, and Prayer Books.

Their leaders were Chinese rabbis, their places of worship were synagogues where the Sacred Writings were venerated, and they kept the Hebrew feasts, and observed the Hebrew rites, such as circumcision. They prepared their meats according to Kosher laws, so that they were known amongst their Chinese neighbours as the "Religion of Sinew-pluckers."

How long these Jews had been in China cannot definitely be ascertained, but probably since the first century of this era. Jewish merchants doubtless came to China across the caravan routes from Palestine, mainly engaged in the silk trade, and bringing their Sacred Rolls and their rabbis with them, they established their synagogues in trading centres. They were on the whole tolerated and even highly favoured by the Court and the people, for it is now known that these Chinese Jews held high official posts in most of the provinces of China. But their last rabbi died about 1800, their last synagogue came to destruction shortly after 1850, and since then the remnant of Chinese Jews has become completely absorbed by the people amongst whom they dwelt,-- probably the only case in history where such has occurred. The history of these Chinese Jews is now being published under the auspices of the Royal Ontario Museum, while relics from their last synagogue are to be found in the great Chinese collection of the Museum.

STRATEGIC MINERALS

"A tremendous increase in the consumption of most mineral substances has resulted from war production," stated Dr. E.S. Moore of the Royal Ontario Museum. "Fortunately North America has more of most of these than other continents. Some, however, are not in sufficient quantities to meet our needs and these are often spoken of as strategic minerals although they may not be used in such quantities as other minerals or be more important to the war effort."

"What are some of these strategic minerals?" we asked.

"Tin, tungsten, chromium, manganese, aluminium and a few others," replied Dr. Moore. "Mercury has recently been found in important quantities in British Columbia and tungsten is being obtained from several sources in increasing amounts. Every effort is being made to find more of these strategic minerals," concluded the geologist.

WHEN IS A PIKE A PICKEREL

The names of most of our fish were given them by the first English speaking settlers to this continent, according to J.R. Dymond, of the Royal Ontario Museum. They sometimes wrongly applied Old World names to New World fish. In the case of the pike they made no mistake because the same fish occurs from England right across northern Europe, Asia and North America. This long, slim fish with the flattened, beak-like snout and back fin placed just in front of the tail fin was the first fish called pike and the only one with any right to that name.

The word "pickerel" means a little pike. There are at least two members of the pike family in eastern North America that never grow more than a foot or fifteen inches in length that are rightly called pickerel. But the fish usually called "yellow pickerel" has no right to the name pickerel because it does not belong to the pike family. It is a long, slender member of the perch family and has the same spiny fins as the common perch. It is properly called, "pike-perch."

Whatever name is used, the pike and pike-perch, will continue to attract the angler and trencherman.

THE WORLD ON DISPLAY

The enterprising merchant puts on a good front. He displays his goods to catch your eye. The Royal Ontario Museum has its show cases, too. Their purpose is to please the eye and excite the mind. Rocks, and minerals, animals, both ancient and modern and the works of man are on view.

There is something to match your taste.

STONE-CUTTING PRIOR TO THE PYRAMIDS

A long tradition of stone-cutting led up to the building of the Pyramids. The mastery of stone, which reached its climax in the architecture and sculpture of these royal tombs of 2400 B.C., began at least a thousand years earlier.

The Royal Ontario Museum has a large collection of Egyptian stone vases ranging in date from early prehistoric times (before 3500 B.C.) to the age of the pyramids. These vessels, beautiful in form and finish, are made from a wide variety of stone. Although soft stones were often used, vases of very hard stone, such as diorite, granite, basalt, and porphyry were common. The complete mastery of the material is more wonderful when we remember that techniques were primitive and the tools themselves almost always of stone. Methods of production are mainly inferred from tool marks and from sculptured wall pictures in the ancient tombs. But the Museum possesses two additional pieces of evidence: a quartzite vase grinder, and stone cores left in boring with a tubular drill.